

VETERANS COUNCIL OF ST. JOHNS COUNTY

MINUTES OF GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING FEBRUARY 27, 2025

CALL TO ORDER: Chairman Dudley

WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS: Chairman Dudley

GUESTS: New attendees introduced themselves and who they represent.

MINUTES OF LAST MEETING: Minutes of last meeting conducted January 30, 2025, were presented by Chairman Dudley. Copies of the Minutes are available on the sign-in table and were sent to members electronically by the Secretary. The minutes were approved by voice vote with no changes.

TREASURER'S REPORT: Treasurer Mountcastle presented the January and February's Treasurer's Reports to the Council. The Council's December balance was \$178,581.56. As of January 29, 2025, the Council's total liquid cash balance was \$165,642.41. Treasurer Mountcastle went over the Treasurer's Report including all incoming funds and expenses going out. The floor was open for any questions. The Treasurer's Report was approved by voice vote with no changes.

SPEAKERS:

RICK McALLISTER, VIETNAM TUNNEL RATS Mr. McAllister presented a slide show presentation on Vietnam Tunnel Rats. Mr. McAllister gave the history of the tunnels of Vietnam as far back as the 1800's. He gave a background on why the tunnel complexes were created and their existence during the Vietnam War. The Tunnel Rats for the US Forces, for the majority, were Combat Engineers. Mr. McAllister spoke of his experience as a Tunnel Rat while serving in Vietnam. He discussed what he went through with his duties of going down in the tunnels and what he encountered. The floor was open for questions. 5

VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE, MAC McDERMOTT Mr. McDermott spoke of selecting a new Service Officer, a Navy Veteran, and he appears that he is going to fit into the St. Johns County Veterans Service Office very well. The training course for newly hired Service Officers is now offered online and hopefully his certification will happen sooner than in the past. The annual training/re-certification for all Service Officers will take place May 4th – 8th. Mr. McDermott also talked about Jonathon Rios, the latest hired Service Officer who is coming off his 6-month probationary period and is doing very well. Mr. McDermott also spoke of the Veterans that are having concerns over benefits being taken away, or reduced, with the new Administration in Washington DC. He assured the audience, through the Secretary of the VA, that no benefits are going to be reduced or taken away at this time. The floor was open for questions.

VETERANS TREATMENT COURT, JOHN LESLIE Mr. Leslie introduced himself and gave the history of and what the Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) does for our Veterans in the legal system. The VTC is now in its ninth year. There will be two new graduates at the February 28th Treatment Court hearing, everyone is invited to attend. Mr. Leslie gave an update on the VTC and the number of participants the VTC has helped through the legal system process, there are currently 41 Veterans inflow. There are currently fifteen mentors, but the VTC is always looking for additional volunteers to become mentors. The floor was open for questions regarding the VTC.

UNFINISHED/NEW BUSINESS Chairman Dudley gave an update on the Veterans Village and things are going well. Some of the contract repairs are beginning. All the Military Service flags are now in place and attached to the building. All permits have been approved for the flag poles and those should be going in soon. There is currently 75% occupancy at Veterans Village and other rooms are being repaired. There are already approved Veterans on a waiting list for those rooms when repairs are complete. 6 The SR16 facility is coming along very nicely and hopefully by early April there will be a grand opening at the complex. Chairman Dudley spoke of the current spending of the Veterans Council funds and the quick drawdown of the money. There have been many requests for assistance since before Christmas. Many Veterans need help, and several other organizations are recommending Veterans contact the Veterans Council for assistance. We help as much as we can, but unless more funding becomes available, we may have to limit our assistance also. Chairman Dudley is working with others, such as the AMP, to locally help continue raising the needed funds. Chairman Dudley spoke of the upcoming 50th Anniversary Remembrance of the ending of the Vietnam War on March 29, 2025. He encourages all to attend the local celebrations that will be held. Chairman Dudley had the Jacksonville National Cemetery Support Committee down to St. Augustine for a tour of our local National Cemetery. A historical tour was given to them. The purpose of having them come down was to show them the issues we are experiencing with the dire need for repair for several of the areas throughout the St. Augustine National Cemetery. Numerous letters have been written requesting support and hopefully having them visit will help in acquiring support for the repairs needed. The floor was open for questions and new business.

The meeting adjourned at 8:32 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

William Dudley, Chairman